

EGYPTIAN MYTHOLOGY

GODS, KINGS, QUEENS & PHAROAHs



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Egyptian Mythology:
Gods, Kings, Queens, & Pharaohs

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Chapter 1: An Introduction to the World of Ancient Egypt

The pharaohs, queens and gods of ancient Egypt has continued to inspire people from all over the world for centuries. Since antiquity, scholars, professionals of all areas and enthusiasts have flocked to Egypt to discover more about this well-known but still mysterious civilization. This book intends to delve into this enigmatic culture, looking at some of the pharaohs, the Egyptian queens and the gods they worshipped.

The pharaoh and the office of the monarch were seen as the center of the Egyptian culture. It was the pharaoh's job to ensure that he maintained the status quo regarding societal order, known as *maat*. Included in this was political stability, maintaining peace and order, dispense justice, overseeing the economic balance, appeasing the gods through sacred rituals and to safeguard the country from both domestic and foreign threats.

The pharaoh has often been considered as a divine being, the living representation of the gods on earth, but in reality it was the power of the kingship that the pharaoh symbolized which was considered divine, not the actual pharaoh himself. Living pharaohs was linked with the god Horus, whereas deceased pharaohs were associated with Osiris, but the common people were extremely conscious that their pharaohs were, in fact, mortals.

The succession of the pharaohs was usually passed down from father to son, but the royal queens and mothers played a significant role. Preferably, the heir to the throne was passed down to the son born of the pharaoh and his chief royal wife (typically a close blood relative such as a sister, half-sister for example), to ensure a stronger legitimate claim to the crown. Women enjoyed status and importance through their role as a queen and especially as mother of the pharaoh, showcasing her as a symbol of conception and rebirth. Although Hatshepsut is known as the only queen to assume kingship, there were a number of other female rulers although their reigns were typically short.

Even though only a few of the official records of succession have survived, it appears that the integral for the maintaining the balance of the world alleviated in contradiction of usurpation of power and chaotic undertakings which typically arose during the Ptolemaic Period. One of the most important duties a new pharaoh was given when he initially took the throne was to ensure that the previous pharaoh received the proper funeral rites, allowing the natural order of both the living world and the hereafter to continue. In addition to this, the organization of kingship was malleable enough to support co-regency, where the established pharaoh and his heir would rule together equally.

The ancient kings of Egypt were known as 'pharaoh's', a term which has been used for centuries still. The origin of this title is credited to the Hebrew pronunciation of the

Egyptian word *per-aa*, which can be translated as Big House, referring to the royal dwelling. As time went on, it began to be applied to the king himself. When a pharaoh took the throne, he was presented with five names that created his titulary. These included his Horus name, the Two Ladies name, the Gold Falcon name, the son of Ra name (his birth name) and the King of Upper and Lower Egypt name (throne name). The throne and birth names were encircled in a cartouche when inscribed.

Chapter 2: The Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt

Egyptian mythology is inundated with a variety of gods, goddesses, spirits and monsters, representing every emotion, situation and location. The majority of the Egyptian deities began as local deities but was later on assembled to make a triad or ennead (nine). Throughout ancient Egyptian civilization, there were numerous schools of thought, or ideologies, that emerged, each having a lasting impact on society and their religious beliefs, each asserting its supremacy over the rest. Many of the pharaohs would promote the main local deity to a chief national deity; one example of this was the god Amun who was a native god of Thebes but then rose to preeminence as a chief national god when the pharaoh moved power to Thebes.

Numerous gods and goddesses are given similar characteristics and titles at various points in Egyptian history. One example of this can be found in the goddess Sekhmet. This lion-headed goddess native to Memphis was given the title 'the Eye of Ra' along with Tefnut, Hathor and Mut, and was considered to be the protector of the sun god, Ra. When we look at the god Horus we see various deities sharing this name – Horus the Elder was believed to have been the husband of Hathor, whilst Horus the Younger was believed to be the offspring of Osiris and Isis. Over the course of 3,000 years the Egyptian religious system constantly developed, expanding and including outside deities, creating an extremely complex pantheon.

During the pre-dynastic period, the belief system of the region was mainly animalistic, whereby they believed that particular animals, geological features and plant-life to be the dwellings of spirits). As they went forward into the dynastic period, the gods of the Egyptians were portrayed with symbolic animals, or animal features, founded on the perception of the function or quality of the individual creature. For example, the jackal god Anubis was connected with the rites and functions of funerals and the dead as the real jackals were typically seen on the desert borders where the dead were buried. As such, the Egyptians came to believe that the jackals were safeguarding the souls of the dead. Water gods (Hapi and Aunket, for instance) were incredibly popular deities worshipped by the ancient Egyptians since the flooding and inundation of the River Nile was necessary for them to survive. As the centuries passed, the ancient deities lost more of the symbolic nature and began to be portrayed as more human looking, as well as increasing in number. Deities representing various aspects of the cosmos, hunting and war began to make an appearance.

Even when the Pharaoh Akhenaten, known as the Heretic King, established the cult of the Aten, the land of Egypt was not completely monotheistic. In his capital city, the pharaoh proclaimed that the worship of the Atis bull would continue and even statues of the god of childbirth, the dwarf Bes, have been discovered. In addition to this, Akhenaten and his wife, the renowned beauty Nefertiti, were regularly equated to Shu and Tefnut, illustrating the fact that aspects of the old religion were not completely wiped out with the establishment of a new one god. Later on, when Christianity was

established to the land, many of the iconic symbols and legends of the ancient period were adapted and modified to suit the Christians new canon.

In this next section we will look at some of the gods and goddesses of ancient Egypt to understand the role they played in society and history.

Amaunet

Amaunet is an ancient goddess of the air or wind. Her name translates as 'She Who is Hidden', 'The Invisible One' or 'That Which is Concealed', emphasizing her role as an atmospheric deity. Amaunet is one of eight primordial deities who existed before the world was created and together they formed the elemental ocean. Ancient Egyptian mythology has numerous creation stories that came out of different locations, usually featuring the local god as the main deity in the myth. Amaunet's creation myth originates in the town of Khmum near Thebes, which was widely known as Hermopolis ('City of Hermes' in Greek). The Greeks connected the chief local god of Djehuty, better known with the Greek name Thoth, with the town. The name of the town, Khmun, translates as Eight Town, and even today's contemporary name of el-Ashmunein, originates from the Coptic word for eight. The number eight was an important figure as it emphasized the significance of totality and the Ogdoad of the region gave the town its name.

The local creation myth from Khmum tells that the primordial ocean consisted of four elements which were symbolized by two pairs of male and female divinities; Formlessness was symbolized by Heh and Hauhet; Darkness by Kek and Kauket; Water by Nun and Naunet; and Air (or Hidden Power) by Amun and Amaunet. Through these gods and goddesses, the primordial waters flowed until they rushed together so violently that they cause flames to rise up and fashion the primordial mound, known as the Isle of Fire. Thoth, the scribe god and a moon deity, arrived on the mound in the shape of an ibis bird and produced an egg. From the egg, the sun was born and Time began. All the gods except for Amun departed to live in the underworld. The local inhabitants of the town state that this version is the earliest creation myth and that Khmum was the locality of the legendary Isle of Fire.

The primordial ocean is a symbol of the yearly flooding and inundation of the River Nile, which has everything required to create the world, and from which the eight gods discovered the complete vitality within the chaotic nature.

Although Amaunet's name is clearly the feminine form of Amun, she appears at the same time as he did. The earliest reference of both deities is together in a Pyramid Text dated to around 2350 – 2345 BCE, in the Fifth Dynasty. The Pyramid Texts are a collection of spells inscribed in the walls of the burial chambers in the pyramids, on the understanding that they would safeguard the pharaoh as he made his way into the hereafter. Although they date back to the Fifth Dynasty, it is highly likely that they are much older as scholars have shown that they use archaic language. Amaunet and Amun, along with the other pairs of gods, were seen to be protective gods, and symbolized the shadowy and veiled powers of nature, which made them ideal gods to protect the deceased pharaoh on his journey.

Just as the other goddesses from the Ogdoad, Amaunet was represented as a woman with a snakehead, although there are illustrations of them with jackal heads instead of

feet. The male gods were typically shown with the heads of frogs, as frogs (along with snakes and jackals) are connected with water, the Underworld and change, but all eight together were sometimes portrayed as baboons, just as Djehuty was occasionally portrayed. Amaunet was occasionally shown in her human guise, wearing the Red Crown of Upper Egypt, occasionally holding a papyrus staff that symbolized the primordial waters in addition as a prosperous new life.

Despite the fact that Amun was combined with the sun god Ra as Amun-Ra and eventually grew into one of the most important gods in the entire country, Amaunet appears to have remained a local goddess in the vicinity of Thebes. After a while, she was replaced by the vulture headed goddess Mut as the wife of Amun, particularly in Thebes, but not entirely. The Egyptians carried on worshipping Amaunet, especially in her cult center of Karnak and in Amun's great temple there was a gigantic statue of her and there were priests dedicated to her service in there.

In the temple of Amun in Djamet (present day Medinet Habu), just across the other side of the River Nile near Luxor, an 18th Dynasty portrayal of Amaunet is shown. This was started by the female pharaoh Hepshepsut during the middle of the 15th century BCE and then carried on by her eventual heir, Thutmose III. This particular temple highlights the struggle Thutmose III had with his reign and the reign of Hepshepsut's and her legacy. As such, numerous depictions and names have been changed or disfigured in the hope that he could expunge her mark on Egyptian history. One of these depictions shows the goddess Amaunet with Thutmose III placing an ankh to his lips; she is presented in completely human form wearing an ancient type of dress typical of goddesses, along with the Red Crown of Upper Egypt. The pharaoh wears a similar headdress to that of Amun, associating himself as the goddess' husband. The temple underwent many alterations right into the Ptolemaic period, highlighting the fact that Amaunet continued to be worshipped for centuries. It is estimated that Amaunet was worshipped here for around 2,300 years.

As one of the primordial goddesses, Amaunet was considered to be a protecting Mother Goddess, an essential role in order to keep the balance of the universe in check. She played a significant role in various kingship festivals, which included the sed festival, which the pharaoh performed every so often in his reign to replenish his vitality and allowed him to continue to rule in success. Amaunet has sometimes been called the Mother of Ra, and the association between Amun and Ra made her to be seen as the wife and mother of her consort. The pharaoh was often depicted as suckling from the breast of Amaunet, which gave him strength and protection.

Amun

Amun was one of the eight deities that made up the Ogdoad of Hermopolis. He was the male personification of air or the Hidden Power and was the husband of Amaunet. However, in the 12th Dynasty, Amun's worship was established in Thebes and he was given Mut as his wife and became the chief god over the rest. With Mut, Amun had a single child, the moon deity known as Khonsu. The Pharaoh Ahmose I of the New Kingdom era had him promoted to a national god instead of a local one as the pharaoh believed that Amun had aided him from forcing the Hyksos from Egyptian lands. In addition to this, Amun was also brought into the Ennead of Heliopolis where he was identified with Ra and became known as Amun-Ra.

Although it is possible that there were once two distinct deities given the same name of Amun, it is much more likely that the attributes of the Theban god Montu (also known as Montju) were simply transferred to Amun of Heliopolis when the latter superseded him as the chief deity of the region.

The meaning of Amun's name can be translated as 'the Hidden One' or the 'Secret One'; according to mythology, Amun created himself before creating the rest of the world whilst maintaining distance from the world itself. As such, Amun was the first enigmatic and undividable creator. When he was combined with the sun god Ra, he became both a visible and invisible god – this duality would be mirrored later on in much of Egyptian mythology and the individual identities of the gods.

Amun superseded Montu in Thebes and then the rest of the country, but was also became combined with many other deities, becoming known as Amun-Ra-Atum, Amun-Ra-Montu, Amun-Min and Amun-Ra-Horakhty.

As with many deities in mythology, Amun was linked with various animals, some of which he would take their shape in inscriptions. The first form he was associated with was a goose whereby he was known as the 'Great Cackler'. Legends tell how he could shed his skin just as a snake would and rejuvenate himself. The most common depiction of him in animal form was that of a ram, which symbolizes fertility. Other depictions show him as a human man with a ram's head, a uraeus (Royal Cobra), and a crocodile head or with the head of an ape. Another common form he takes in inscriptions is that of a king sitting on his throne with the double plumed crown on his head. Throughout the Ptolemaic era, the depictions of the god cast in bronze show him as a human man with a beard, the body of a beetle, four arms, hawk wings, human legs and lion's paws and claws.

In the Pyramid Texts Amun was said to be the primordial creator deity, a representation of the creative energy of the world. During the 11th Dynasty, Amun gained importance as he superseded Montu as the foremost god of Thebes. As time went on, Amun's recognition as the chief god was associated with the city itself and when the pharaoh Ahmose I was able to force the Hyksos from the country, he presented offerings to

Amun for his help. During the Middle Kingdom, the pharaoh and his family erected several temples to the god, the most important of which were the Great Temple of Karnak and the Luxor Temple.

In the New Kingdom period, Amun had achieved such importance and prestige that the country was nearly a monotheistic culture already. As Amun-Ra, he was seen to be the father of Egypt and the guardian of the king himself. Royal women in Thebes held status and power, and linked with the cult of the god. The chief wife of Ahmose I, Queen Ahmose Nefertari, was given the epithet of God's Wife of Amun; afterwards, this moniker was applied to every chief royal wife to honor her position within the national cult of Amun. The female pharaoh Hatshepsut even claimed that Amun had taken on the form of the pharaoh Thutmose II (her father) laid with her mother and conceived her. As such, this assertion allowed her to proclaim she was the rightful heir to the throne since she was the child of Amun.

Amun's will and wishes could be communicated through his oracles that were controlled by the priests. These priests amassed so much land that they matched the supremacy of the pharaoh himself. When Amenhotep III came to power, he created several reforms when he became concerned that the priests at Thebes were holding far too much power but his son, the Heretic King Akhenaten, pushed further and replaced the worship of Amun with the solar disc, the Aten. He established a new royal city but after his death, his son, Tutankhamn, reinstated the old religion.

Amun's power and prestige was so high that his cult was transferred into other countries, especially into Nubia. Amen-Ra became the chief god of the Napata Kingdom in Nubia by the 25th Dynasty, believing that he originated from north Sudan and even the ancient Greeks deemed him to be the correspondent of Zeus.

Amun's main festival was the Opet where a statue of the god was transported along the River Nile, originating from the Great Temple of Karnak to the Temple of Luxor. This was to honor the god's marriage to Mut (or even Taweret).

Anuket

Anuket was a prehistoric goddess of the cataracts of the River Nile around the area of Abu Island, which was also known as Elephantine Island in both the classical period and today), located in southern Egypt near the Nubian borders. Apart from when the floodwater was high, the cataracts here prevented boats from traveling further south due to their dangerous nature. Anuket was either the sister or the daughter of the goddess Satet, a river goddess of the First Cataract. Along with the ram god Khnum, both Anuket and Satet form the Elephantine Triad worshipped greatly during the Middle Kingdom period (c. 2040 – 1640 BCE). The gazelle was the animal identified with the goddess, with the antelope with Satet, animals both found near watering holes and rivers, and as such, both animals and goddesses were regularly related together in the ancient Egyptian mentality.

Anuket's name translates as 'She Who Embraces' or as 'She Who Clasps'. This could be a reference to the precipitous and encompassing embankments of the River Nile located in the region of the First Cataract, which is believed to clasp the river in Anuket's embrace. Another possibility is that her name is a reference to the yearly inundation of the River Nile when the waters would overspill into the meadows near the banks there are ancient references that say how the floodwater 'embraces' the fields. However, there is a darker theory to her namesake, as it could also be translated as 'She Who Strangles', indicating a dual nature similar to that of Hathor and Sekhmet who legends tell how they both went on a murderous rampage indeed, in Thebes, Anuket was often identified with Hathor.

Although it is not known for certain, it is believed that Anuket originated in Nubia. We know that she was already being worshipped in the Old Kingdom period, but was already being worshipped in Nubia at that point. In the Pre-dynastic period, many of the gods of Egypt had already been established, but the Egyptian borders hadn't been established that far south, so it is quite likely that she was of Nubian origin.

In the Old Kingdom period, Anuket was considered to be the sun god Ra's daughter but by the Middle Kingdom era she had been incorporated into the Elephantine Triad. Initially, it appears as though she was a minor consort of Khnum, with Satet being the chief wife, but then was believed to be their daughter during the New Kingdom era.

Anuket has several attributes as a goddess of the hunt, similar to that of Satet, possibly as they were identified with the different species of antelope in the region they were worshipped. Depictions of Anuket show her as a human woman with a gazelle's head, or rarely as a gazelle entirely. Most common images show her as a human woman wearing a sheath dress with a flat-topped crown decorated with tall feathers (a design believed to be from Nubia itself so confirming her Nubian roots). Occasionally, the headdress would feature a uraeus, the royal cobra placed on headdresses to symbolise Lower Egypt, but with Anuket it is to highlight her royal status, rather than being a geological indication. In her hand she holds a papyrus sceptre to signify power and regeneration, and in the

other, an ankh to indicate eternal life, equally fitting for a goddess of the River Nile.

Anuket was the equivalent of the Greek goddess Hestia, the virgin goddess of the home and hearth. However, this can be somewhat confusing since Anuket was a river goddess and more than that, her name of 'Embraces' signifies her as a mother goddess. Indeed, she was considered a divine, motherly protector of the pharaoh and was invoked as such – there are inscriptions that refer to her as Mother of the King. It could be that when she was incorporated into the Elephantine Triad with Khnum and Satet she was then associated with Hestia. Unfortunately, we are still unclear on this matter.

The goddess' principal cult center was located at Abu Island, close to Aswan, alongside Khnum and Satet. In addition to this, Anuket had a temple dedicated to her on the island of Setet, which is known today as Sehel Island, located roughly two miles upstream of Abu. Anuket was worshiped in the northern area of Nubia close to the Nubian-Egyptian border, and features in the reliefs at the temple to Amun-Ra are Beit el-Wali in Nubia. Rameses II commissioned this temple and although the cult statue of Amun-Ra has long been devastated, the wall paintings have mercifully survived. In addition to this, a statue of the pharaoh with Anuket and Khmun has also endured the long centuries. One of the paintings shows Anuket breastfeeding the pharaoh, which illustrates her divine protection. Another temple in Nubia, located at el-Dakka, dating back to the Ptolemaic period, provides beautiful portrayals of the goddess. Just before the Aswan High Dam was finished in 1971, both temples were disassembled and then reconstructed on elevated ground in order to protect it from being submerged by the waters of the newly created Lake Nassar.

Elephantine Island, or Abu Island, was the capital city in the First Upper Nome (which roughly equates to a province or administrative locality), which has been inhabited as early as the Early Dynastic era (c. 3100 – 2686 BCE). A temple had been erected here on the cataract but as time went on and the amount of land available was limited, later temples were established one after another, so that archaeologists can clearly see the development of construction levels. The original shrine established there was an alcove carved into the rock that was most likely the place where the god's cult statue was positioned – we still do not know the identity of the god worshiped there unfortunately. However, from the archaeological evidence, particularly figurines of children (suggesting that they were ritual offerings in the hopes of a straightforward birth), it is most likely that the deity was a goddess instead of a male god. It is possible that the goddess was Satet, or an early version of her, as she was far more associated with giving birth and would be worshipped there later on.

Elephantine Island receives its name from the ivory trade that ran through this area; as an entrance to Nubia, many excursions (both royal and commercial) were regularly started from this point. The Elephantine Triad was often beseeched by traders, merchants and adventurers in order to gain protection from the precarious voyages they were just about to embark on. Archaeologists have uncovered over 200 inscriptions to Anuket and the other deities on Sehel Island itself, thanking them for their protection to and from the region.

Anuket and Satet have already been mentioned that they could have been sisters or mother and daughter, but another theory is that they were originally one goddess who was then separated into two identities. During the later periods of Dynastic Egypt, the two goddesses were often compared with Isis and Nephthys, sister goddesses, who were known in mythology for the roles in supporting and mourning for Osiris – so it could be that Anuket and Satet were considered to be a local version of Isis and Nephthys.

Anuket was also known as Anket, Anquet, with Anukis being the Greek version of her name. Her titles also include Lady of Elephantine, Lady of the Cataracts, Lady of Heaven and Mistress of Nubia, to name but a few.

Bast

Also known as Bastet, Bast is one of the most well-known and beloved deities from Egyptian mythology. Known popularly as the cat goddess, Bast originally was shown with the head of a lioness or of a desert sand cat; it was only in the New Kingdom era that she became identified with the domesticated cat. Despite this, her roots as a war-like goddess still remained. She was the divine personification of the liveliness, elegance, warmth and calculating nature of the cat, along with the ferocious strength of a lion. Her main cult center was located at Bubastis in Lower Egypt, in the 18th nome, but she was worshipped throughout the country. At one point in the Late Period, Bubastis became the Egyptian capital and Bast's name was used in various pharaohs' throne names.

The translation of her name is as 'Devouring Lady' but the phonetic aspects of part of the hieroglyphs used are replaced with a different one when it comes to the word 'Devour'. Part of her name is identified with an oil jar, which is connected with perfume – Bast was seen to be the mother of a perfume god, Nefertum, indicating that although she may be sweet and beautiful, she was a dangerous predator at heart.

In art, Bast was often portrayed as a human woman with the head of a lioness, desert sand cat or of a domesticated cat. In one hand she typically holds an ankh, the symbol of eternal life, or a papyrus wand to signify Lower Egypt. Sporadically, Bast is shown holding a war scepter and surrounded by kittens.

Sekhmet

The prehistoric goddess of war, annihilation, pestilence and healing, Sekhmet is a well-known and popular deity from ancient Egyptian mythology. Her name translates as 'The Powerful One' and has been identified with Hathor in various locations and periods. Typically, she is shown as a human woman with a lioness head, occasionally with a sun disc and uraeus on her headdress. As such, she is the personification of the harsh heat of the sun. Together with her consort Ptah and their son, Nefertum (or sometimes with Imhotep), they make up the Memphis Triad.

Legends tell that the sun god Ra became enraged with humans in earth and so tore out his eye and threw it at the humans. Doing so, the eye transformed into the goddess Sekhmet in her lioness form and she began to kill the humans without mercy, drinking their blood by the gallon. Upon seeing her destructive force, Ra realized that if she continued killing the way she was, there would be no humans left on earth. Ra mixed beer and pomegranate juice together in a lake; Sekhmet, thinking this was an entire lake of blood, drank the entire contents before passing out. The following day when she awoke, she was quieter and humanity was spared.

Although Sekhmet was a destructive and warlike deity, she had a dual nature just as many of the other deities in the Egyptian pantheon. When the people did not worship her appropriately, she could send plagues to ravish the land, but when honored enough, she is able to cure them.

Originally, Sekhmet was the consort of the patron god of artists, Ptah. Together they had a son, Nefertum, but later accounts claim she was the mother of Imhotep, a mortal architect who was deified. Imhotep served three pharaohs in his lifetime but his crowning achievement was the creation of the Step Pyramid, recognized as the first pyramid built in ancient Egypt. When he died, he was proclaimed a god and worshipped as a deity of doctors, being able to cure the sick.

Hathor

The ancient goddess of the sky and the mother of the falcon-headed sun god Horus, Hathor is one of the most iconic deities from ancient Egyptian mythology. Hathor's name translates as 'House of Horus' since the sun is housed in the sky. This goddess is typically depicted as a human woman with the head of a cow, or with bovine features such as cow ears, wearing a sun disc enveloped by long horns.

Hathor was considered to be the goddess of love, music, dance, festivals, beauty and joy. The guardian of women, she was invoked whenever human women enhanced their beauty. Appealing to Hathor could bless a woman with fertility and since many of the items used in her sacred rites (such as the sistrum and the menat necklace) were linked with an erotic nature, she was considered to be the Egyptian equivalent of the Greek goddess Aphrodite.

Hathor was an ancient goddess; legends tell how she rose from the reeds in cow form at the beginning of time when the primordial floodwaters receded. Her annual celebration was held on the 19th of July, considered the first day of the year, and was celebrated at her temple in Dendera. Before the sun rose, her cult statue would be taken to the roof of the temple, and when the sun would touch it, the Egyptians believed that her husband Horus was touching her, representing the sanctified matrimony of both sun and sky.

As with Sekhmet, Hathor was also considered to be a daughter of the sun god Ra and the same legend of Sekhmet's bloody massacre of mankind is at times transferred to Hathor. At Kom el-Hisn during the Middle Kingdom, a temple dedicated to Sekhmet-Hathor was erected.

Like with many other gods and goddesses from ancient Egypt, Hathor too had a dual nature. In this she was the guardian of both newborn children and the dead. When a baby was born, seven Hathor's would arrive and present the babe with his or her destiny; as a guardian of the dead, she would greet the deceased with bread and beer when they arrived at the Gates of the West.

Hathor was also known as Lady of the Sycamore, the Gold of the Gods and Mistress of Turquoise, to name but a few.

Nun

Nun was the male primordial deity from which all other deities emerged out of his floodwaters. The theology of the Ogdoad tells how the cosmos was created from the contact of eight components, represented by eight deities, of which Nun was one. Legends say that when the world comes to an end, everything would revert back into these primordial waters. Nun had no particular temple or priesthood dedicated to him but the consecrated lakes created in other temples were a representation of him and there are regular references to this in sacred writings.

As a water deity, Nun was found in every water source in the world, including the origins of the river Nile and the annual flooding of its waters. Nun was also connected with the arranging of all the temple foundations, most likely because water will always stay in a horizontal level, somewhat like a modern day spirit level in household tool kits, ensuring that the foundations were always flat.

In addition to being a primordial water deity, Nun was also related with the chaotic powers of the universe. According to mythology, Ra was annoyed with mankind, as they had not been paying him his due respect, so Nun suggested that Ra send his eye (as Sekhmet or Hathor) and do away with humankind. Despite this, Nun had a positive element, shielding Shu and Tefnut from the chaotic powers of the universe, symbolized as demonic serpents. Another legend tells that Nun advised Nut to change into a celestial cow and transport Ra through the sky as he had become elderly and tired.

In art, Nun was often shown as a human man with the head of a frog, or as a complete frog by itself, a form taken on by all of the Ogdoad, but other depictions show him as a human man with blue or green skin wearing a beard emphasizing his relationship with the River Nile and its fertility. In the form with the blue or green skin, he appears somewhat similar to that of Hapi, the god of the River Nile, and is typically shown standing upright on a solar boat, or else depicted emerging from waters with a palm front indicating elongated life. Intermittently he is shown as in an androgynous form with prominent breasts.

Nun was often identified with the god Ptah in Memphis where they were merged into the combined god Ptah-Nun. Nun and Ptah were thought to be the father of Ra (or even Atum), but the priests of Thebes claimed that their city was the location where the primordial mound arose when the waters of Nun receded. The Theban priests claimed that although Nun was a powerful force, he was an inactive element until Amun (who was both the patron god of Thebes and one of the Ogdoad as well) transformed himself into the original mound, giving rise to the further gods.

Wadjet

Wadjet is one of the earliest deities from ancient Egypt, with her having an established cult already in the Pre-dynastic Period, but as the centuries passed, she evolved into one of the most important and iconic deities. Initially, she was known as Per-Wadjet from Buto, a local deity, but evolved into the patron goddess of Lower Egypt. When the Pre-dynastic period came to a close, Wadjet was seen to be the actual embodiment of Lower Egypt rather than just a patron goddess, and was typically portrayed in art alongside her sister, Nekhbet, who was the embodiment of Upper Egypt. Together, the sisters symbolized the entire country and were incorporated into the pharaoh's nebty name, which is commonly referred to as the Two Ladies name, signifying that he ruled over both Upper and Lower Egypt. The earliest pharaoh to use the Two Ladies name was Anedjib from the First Dynasty.

According to the Pyramid Texts, Wadjet was accredited with making the original papyrus plant and papyrus swamp. This connection is further supported since the character for papyrus was used in her name and it was the characteristic plant of Lower Egypt.

Another legend tells that Wadjet was the daughter of Atum (later on her father was said to be Ra) and was sent to go searching for Shu and Tefnut when they went missing in Nun's primordial waters. When the gods were finally found, Atum (or Ra) was so overcome with emotion that the tears he cried were transformed into humans. In order to reward Wadjet, he positioned her on his head in the shape of a cobra, so that she could be her father's protector and stay near to him.

Wadjet was one of several goddesses who were ascribed the epithet of 'Eye of Ra'; the other goddesses also presented with it included Bast, Sekhmet, Tefnut, Hathor and several others. Indeed, this title was regularly referred to as 'the Wadjet'; in this guise, her father sent her to earth in order to exact revenge on mankind but she became drunk on human blood and almost annihilated them. Humans were only spared this fate when a massive amount of beer was dyed red with pomegranate juice to look like blood; she drank the liquid, passed out and when she awoke, she had lost her murderous rage.

It has also been put forward that Wadjet was related closely with the principle of justice or balance, otherwise known as ma'at. Before Geb took the crown, he had raped his own mother, Tefnut. When he started to take his position as pharaoh and place the uraeus on his head, the cobra straightened up and assaulted both Geb and his entourage. Everyone apart from Geb was killed, although he was wounded greatly. As such, he had obviously upset the balance of ma'at and Wadjet could not let him go without punishment.

Wadjet was seen and referred to as a violent goddess whereas her sister Nekhbet was regarded as a far more motherly figure. However, like the other deities, Wadjet had a dual nature so there were instances where she displays a softer side to her personality. Mythology tells that when Isis gave birth to her son Horus, Wadjet aided Isis in nursing her baby and then hiding them in the marshy swamps of the delta from Set. During

childbirth, women would often call upon her in the hopes for an easy birth.

She further helped Horus hide from his uncle and his retinue when the young god grew up, aided by her sister. Horus chased them taking the guise of a sun disc with wings, with Wadjet and her sister in the guise of crowned serpents. As such, when the pharaohs wore a headdress with a Royal Uraeus on it, it symbolized that the gods themselves protected him. During the 18th Dynasty and onwards, the queens of Egypt would position one or two Royal uraeus' to their headdresses to represent the two deities of Upper and Lower Egypt.

Wadjet was identified as the 5th hour of the 5th day every month, along with the month harvests would take place, known as iput-hmt, or Epipti. Her celebrations were held on the tenth day of Mekhir, known as a "the day of going forth of the goddess", and the seventh day of Payni and eighth day of Messori, the days roughly corresponding with the spring and winter solstices.

Her chief temple, the Temple of Wadjet, was commonly named Pe-Dep, and had been established long before the Old Kingdom period. In addition, the temple was referenced in the Pyramid Texts. Inscriptions and reliefs in her temple show her relationship with Horus. At various locations and periods, Wadjet was the wife of different gods. For example, in Lower Egypt she was the wife of Hapi, and in Thebes she was the wife of Ptah at times.

Unsurprisingly, the cobra was considered Wadjet's sacred animal and was regularly shown in a rearing position, or as a human woman with the red crown of Egypt on her head. She is frequently shown alongside her sister Nekhbet in either serpent or female human form. However, in the Late Period another animal associated with her was the ichneumon, as it was well known for its ability to kill snakes, along with being the sacred animal of Horus. When a person died, statues of the goddess were stuffed with mummified ichneumon and shrew, and then interred with the human remains. The ichneumon symbolized day, whereas the shrew symbolized night. Other depictions show her as vulture goddess and in her guise as the Eye of Ra she was a human woman with the head of a lion and a solar disc on top with the royal cobra on it.

Chapter 3: Pharaohs and Queens of Egypt

The pharaohs of Ancient Egypt, along with their queens, have inspired artists, historians and the general public since antiquity. Although they were recognized as mortal men, there was a divine element to their nature since they were seen to be the living manifestation, or rather the embodiment, of the divine nature of kingship. Ancient Egyptian history is divided into 31 dynasties with around 170 pharaohs over those 3,000 years. Ideally, the throne was handed from father to son, but throughout the long history this succession to the throne was disrupted by murder, chaos and secretive vanishings.

The ancient pharaohs were considered to be the living manifestations of the gods in heaven, ruling from around 3150 BCE to 30 CE when Egypt was finally conquered by the Roman Empire. When a new line took control, a new 'kingdom', or period, would begin. Pharaohs would often marry their female family members including daughters, sisters, granddaughters, cousins etc. in order to keep the throne within their family line. However, despite this practice, the throne was often taken control by outsiders, fashioning a wonderfully diverse and interesting history.

The word 'pharaoh' is the title used by ancient rulers. It can be translated as 'Great House', and references to the royal estate.

As stated, Egyptian history is divided into 31 dynasties but some academics will include a Dynasty 0 but it is important to remember that the pharaohs or kings from this era have not been understood very well from the archaeological record. In addition to this, some of the dynasties overlapped with each other during the transitional times.

Narmer

Narmer was an early pharaoh from the First Dynasty in the Early Dynastic Period and is credited with being the first Egyptian king to unite both Upper and Lower Egypt. The famous Narmer Palette discovered by archaeologists depicts him wearing the white crown and striking an enemy on one side; on the other, it shows him wearing the red crown and he oversees his fallen enemies. In official records in the later periods, his name is removed from the king's list but there are numerous references to Narmer despite this.

Menes

The Greek historian Herodotus tells that Menes was the founding pharaoh of the First Dynasty of the Early Dynastic Period. Future historians credit him with the construction of the Memphis walls but the archaeological record disputes this. Contemporary archaeologists associate him with either Narmer or Aha.

Djoser

Archaeologists as one of the most important eras consider the period of which the pharaoh Djoser ruled over in Egyptian history. Under his rule, the country enjoyed great developments in architecture, commerce, arts, religion and agriculture to name but a few. Back then, Djoser was known as Netjerykhet which can be translated as “godlike of body”, which mirrors the belief that Djoser was the living manifestation of the god Horus. Although the pharaohs of Egypt were considered to be of divine birth, Djoser was the very first king to be seen as a living god on earth.

The name Djoser and the name as pharaoh Netjerykhet were first associated with each other around a thousand after his reign. Scholars consider that Djoser was the birth name of the pharaoh. His name translates as ‘holy one’ and he reigned during the Third Dynasty of the Old Kingdom, which commenced in 2650 BCE. There are no official king lists for this period, which can make it somewhat challenging to confirm the pharaoh’s rules. It is believed that Djoser reigned somewhere between 19 and 28 years, differing on which resource is referenced.

The family of pharaoh Djoser is somewhat uncertain. We don’t know for certain as to when he was born or who precisely he was born to. However, scholars believe that his mother was Queen Nimaathap and his father was pharaoh Khasekhemwy, who was the final king of the Second Dynasty. There are several scholars who think that Djoser’s brother Nebka took the throne when their father died and when he died, then Djoser took the crown. Djoser’s wife was Queen Hetephernebt, who could be the daughter of his own father. Djoser had no sons but did produce two daughters. When he died, Sekhemkhet who could have been related to Djoser followed him.

The reign of Djoser is quite interesting and there are many inscriptions noting the key events of his rule. One in particular is the seven year famine that took place. Whilst sleeping, the pharaoh dreamt that the god Khnum was incredibly upset with how his shrine had lapsed into disarray. Upon waking, Djoser made his way to Elephantine Island and commissioned a new temple to be dedicated to the god. After this, the food crisis was finished.

The archaeological record shows that both pharaoh Djoser and his successors travelled to the Sinai Peninsula in the search for raw materials, in particular, that of copper and turquoise. Djoser was able to expand trade and commerce, as well as establishing a strong civil service organization. In addition to this, the religious structure began to be far more ordered and complex. Reliefs from his reign show that the progression of the arts developed quickly due to its significance.

Djoser’s most famous achievement is by far the Step Pyramid, his lasting legacy. Before the Step Pyramid was created, the pharaohs of Egypt had been buried elsewhere but Djoser had his tomb built at Saqqara. The creation of the pyramid was overseen by his vizier, Imhotep, and when it was completed, it would go down in history as the first colossal stone building ever created.

The step pyramid was created in order to ensure that the body of the pharaoh would remain undisturbed during his eternal rest. Despite their best attempts, grave robbers looted the pyramid in ancient times. In 1934, the Egyptologist Jean-Philippe Lauer emptied the burial chamber inside but all that remained of the pharaoh's mummy was a left foot and a few other parts. But regardless of the fact that the Step Pyramid didn't protect his earthly remains, Djoser managed to secure his legacy with numerous achievements that helped his country for thousands of years.

Snefru

Also known as Sneferu, Snefru was the first pharaoh of the Fourth Dynasty of the Old Kingdom Period. His name translates as 'to make beautiful'. He has gone down in Egyptian history as one of the most fair and just monarchs.

It is still unclear as to what the relationships were concerning the pharaohs of the Third and Fourth Dynasties. It is believed that Huni, the final pharaoh of the Third Dynasty, could have been Snefru's father but we do not have any proof that this was so.

We do know that Snefru married Huni's daughter, named Hetepheres. If we believe that Huni was Snefru's father as well, then Snefru married his sister (most likely a half-sister) just as many other pharaohs did throughout history. This practice allowed the new successor to strengthen their right to rule. Khufu, his most famous child and successor, was one of several children Snefru produced. His vizier, Prince Nefermaat, might have been his child as well.

A mastaba (an early type of Egyptian tomb) was found by archaeologists near his Meidum pyramid. It was meant to be for a deceased son of the pharaoh, and scholars believe that the royal capital could have been transferred elsewhere when his son died. Other mastaba tombs for his children were discovered in various locations, allowing us to accumulate a register of his offspring.

Snefru ruled Egypt for a minimum of 24 years and during this period he launched numerous military excursions into Nubia and Libya. His goal was to capture enough slaves to swell his labor force, as well as providing the much needed raw materials for trade and construction, along with cattle. He established marine trading routes, probably from Lebanon, for cedar and established mining operations for copper and turquoise in the Sinai.

These expeditions, operations and trading relationships were intended to aid him in his numerous construction projects. So that he could do this, he restricted the social organization so that fewer people were needed to grow food. Under his rule, architects acquired the methods needed to construct pyramids.

If Djoser's rule was one of advancement, then Snefru's rule was one of experimentation. Architects learnt different ways of building new styles of pyramids than that of a stepped version, along with new painting styles for the tombs. Archaeologists have discovered paintings in his pyramid with both depictions simply painted onto the plaster itself and others whittled into the walls perhaps trying to see which method would endure the longest.

Snefru was one of the great builders of ancient Egypt, constructing many buildings but his most famous complexes were his three pyramids. The first pyramid he created was a step pyramid at Meidum but it was transformed into a true pyramid through an exterior smooth layer; this was added later on in his reign and could mirror Ra's importance in the country's religious structure. Each of the pyramids was built with a funerary

complex that consisted of courtyards, temples and even a false burial chamber.

When Snefru transferred the royal court to Dahshur, he commissioned the construction of two more pyramids. The Bent Pyramid was the first to be erected. The incline was initially 55 degrees, but the ground underneath was unbalanced and when the monument splintered, the architects had a case built around the bottom. Since the remainder of the pyramid was set at 43 degrees, the pyramid has a distinctive bent appearance.

The Red Pyramid was the third and final pyramid commissioned by Snefru. The middle of the pyramid was fashioned from red limestone, hence its name. Inside, the pyramid's formation is much simpler than that of the Bent Pyramid and archaeologists think there may be hidden chambers inside both pyramids waiting to be explored.

The body of pharaoh Snefru has never been found and we do not know if any of these pyramids were his royal tomb. It is believed that the pharaoh had several smaller pyramids constructed as the locations for his funeral cult several have been excavated but apart from one, none have been linked to the pharaoh.

Much of the information we have on Snefru originates from his funeral complexes; there are few temples that originate from his rule.

Queen MerNeith

It is still uncertain as to whether Queen MerNeith was a ruler of the country in the First Dynasty circa 2920 BCE. She was the wife of Pharaoh Djety and when he died she is thought to have ruled the country but her name does not feature on the official king's list. Her name translates as 'Beloved of Neith'.

When her husband died, her son Den was still too young to take the throne and so she ruled in his stead. This makes Queen MerNeith the first female ruler of the Egyptian civilization. However, it should be stated that various scholars consider her Den's co-regent.

Queen Neithikret

Queen Neithikret gained prominence and power around 2148 – 2144 BCE, in what is known as the transitional period between the Old Kingdom and the First Intermediate Period. She is also known as Nitigret and Nitocris and despite that her name is references numerous times, she remains a mysterious and unfamiliar queen.

Queen Sobekneferu

Queen Sobekneferu, whose name translates, 'Sobek is the beauty of Ra', ruled the country between 1806 – 1802 BCE in the 12th Dynasty. When her brother-husband, Pharaoh Amenemhat IV, died, she took the throne and ruled by herself. She utilized both masculine and feminine names throughout her reign, perhaps to help lessen the disapproval of female monarchs. During her rule, she finished the funerary complex of her brother-husband and commissioned various monuments at Herakleopolis Magna. Statues of the queen missing their heads have been found in the Delta.

Queen Hatshepsut

Queen Hatshepsut, better known as the Pharaoh Hatshepsut, is the best known female pharaoh to come out of Ancient Egypt. She married her half-brother Thutmose II so that he could strengthen his claim to the throne once their father passed on. His three older brothers died early, which allowed him to become pharaoh.

Hatshepsut desired to rule Egypt and she claimed that she was the co-regent along with her father; she further stated that she was his heir when he died.

In order to strengthen the view that she could rule as effectively as any other male, she wore men's clothing and the iconic false beard, which she had statues made depicting. During her rule, she had her subjects call her King. Throughout her reign she commissioned the construction of numerous structures that have survived into modern times.

Conclusion

The world of ancient Egypt is unlike that of any other civilization known to the world. For more than three thousand years, it dominated much of the North African and Mesopotamian region. Her rich religious structure and mythology has inspired artists from all periods, providing us with a unique way of glimpsing into this era.

The history of ancient Egypt is just as rich and inspiring as her religious structure. From the Pre-Dynastic period, shrouded in mystery and obscure legend, to the colorful end when she was finally conquered by the Roman Empire, the history of this country continues to fascinate and appeal to all ages.